



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	Practitioners' Operational Group (POG)
Date:	25 February 2015
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Geoff Scammell (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Barry Dennett, Sean Whelan, Marco Almeida Keith Dial in: Alistair Mews, Liz Wright, Graham Gallear, Jane Millbank</p> <p>LAAs: Paul Ellary, Gwyn Thomas, Martin O'Neill, Mark Gillmore, June Deans Dial-in: Frankie Cartwright, Pamela Richardson, Matthew Evans, Les Robertson</p>
Apologies:	Karl Thomas, Paula Doherty, Chris Boylett
1. Welcome and Introductions:	<p>DWP opened the meeting and introductions were made round the table and for those dialing in.</p>
2. Matters Arising	<p>Minutes</p> <p>The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.</p> <p>Action Points:</p> <p>AP Oct 01/March 01 2014; POG members reminded DWP that the issue is concerned with all overpayments of DHP and not just the benefit cap. The remaining action points were cleared.</p>
3. HB Review Update	<p>DWP updated the meeting on the measures introduced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decisions will be emailed to LAs. <p>The meeting discussed email protocols for non GCSX addresses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reminders will be issued after 5 days to local authority (LA) Revenues and Benefits managers where there has been no response.• From 30 January, the data base will capture details of whether LAs have

responded and whether they have agreed with or challenged the decision. Details will be included in future summary reports to LA Revenues and Benefits managers.

POG members suggested that a full review and evaluation should be carried out once the exercise has been completed.

From a DWP perspective the Review of HB is working well.

4. Amalgamation of Security Operations Group (SOG) into POG

DWP explained that following discussions at the Steering Group concerning the rationalisation of consultation forums, the Steering Group has asked for POG and SOG to be amalgamated. DWP pointed out that with an expanded remit, sufficient time would need to be set aside to ensure full discussion of all relevant items. DWP added that this would be the last meeting chaired by the current chair. POG members thanked the current chair for his positive and committed contribution to POG.

An explanatory letter will be issued to SOG members.

5. Social Fund Funeral Payments

DWP explained that the key issue is around the need for data on awards of Housing Benefit (HB) from LAs in order to process Social Fund Funeral payments, and the time it takes currently to obtain this information.

DWP advised the meeting that the Funeral Payment team has looked at the current processes and there is no centralised process. DWP is seeking early engagement in order to streamline the process. The recommendation is to adopt a national interactive template and an escalation route for delayed or non responses, of more than ten working days.

POG members asked whether there were any alternative means for obtaining this information without the need to introduce new measures.

POG pointed out that LAs were previously not obligated to furnish this information.

POG suggested that this could feed into discussions around new burdens for the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for the Single Fraud Investigation service (SFIS).

An action point was taken for DWP to consider whether the proposed new arrangements for gathering HB data from LAs for Funeral Payments could feed into discussions around new burdens for the SPOC for SFIS.

6. Payment Deduction Programme (PDP) Workshops

DWP gave the meeting the background to the proposals to hold PDP workshops :

- Debt migration is tied to the Universal Credit (UC) schedule for transition and migration.
- The debts in question are Tax Credits, HB, Social Fund, DWP legacy benefits and Third Party Deductions.
- PDP is looking for an automated interface and the Local Authority Data Sharing

(LADS) team has been commissioned in respect of the front facing interface.

POG advised the meeting of the situation in Scotland in respect of Third Party debts.

DWP outlined the current process and anticipated volumes for HB debt in the UC live service.

DWP informed the meeting of the current position and potential future developments for HB debt migration in the UC Digital Service.

DWP explained that for the HB debt automated solution the High Level Business Requirements (HLBR) have been signed off. Representatives from the LA Transition Working Group (LATWG) were invited to impact and comment on issues identified through the HLBR process. An Issues Log has been produced and POG was content for these issues to be taken into the process for the Detailed Business Requirements (DBR).

With regard to the DBR, DWP explained that the baseline is needed by 10 April. To this end PDP is holding two, two day workshops in London 18 to 19 March and Leeds or Newcastle 25 to 26 March; POG members were specifically invited to these workshops.

Once the workshops have concluded, the DBR will be presented to POG as part of the sign off process.

7. SFIS Service Level Agreement (SLA)/Service Provision

DWP summarised discussions held at January's POG and outlined the response to concerns expressed by POG.

POG asked about LA email access to FRAIMS, referring to Circular F5 2011.

An action point was taken for DWP to look into LA email access to FRAIMS.

The meeting discussed Administration Penalties and the rationale behind DWP policy.

POG asked about the new SLA in respect of compliance. DWP explained that the national SLA will include low level fraud and compliance.

POG pointed out the linkage between the SLA and work ongoing on new burdens.

8. Migrant Access to Benefits (MABs)/Persons From Abroad

POG restated their request for clarification on appeals based on permanent Rights to Reside.

DWP explained that there are different Rights to Reside which carry implications for HB.

Evidence Requirements

DWP explained that there are alternative Rights to Reside and the most common is Article 10, wherein there is a child in full time education. DWP went on to explain the principles around jobseekers and residency.

Work is ongoing on guidance regarding Permanent Rights and 5 year residency. DWP are working closely with Home Office about the evidence requirements to ensure a coherent cross-Government approach. The guidance will be shared with POG

9. AOB

- i) Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs): POG asked for some guidance on the practicalities of administering DHPs. The expansion of UC has seen an increase in applications for DHPs.
- ii) Joint Tenants: POG asked for clarification on the treatment of members of the same household following an Upper Tribunal decision.

An action point was taken for DWP to look into the treatment of members of the same household.

Date of Next Meeting The next POG will take place on 25 March, Caxton House Room 6.03.
10.30 – 12.30

Contact:	Mont Goldman
Email:	Mont.goldman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Direct line:	020 7449 5327